

Contribution of American Women
to the Work of
Abraham Lincoln





0616

m1743



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

The Contribution of American Women to the Work of Lincoln

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

The National Society of Patriotic Women of America

AT

THE WALDORF-ASTORIA, FEBRUARY 11th, 1909

BY

FRANK HENDRICK

Author of Railway Control by Commissions, The Power to Regulate Corporations and Commerce, Constitutional Protection of the Unearned Increment of Value of Public Service Company Property, Policies, Reaction, and the Constitution, etc., etc.

The Contribution of American Women to the Work of Lincoln

THE MORAL EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WAR LARGELY DUE TO WOMEN.

DOU have chosen for your society an auspicious name. There is nothing more noble or productive of good than patriotic womanhood, and in the women of no nation has patriotism been more characteristic than in those of America. "If I were asked," said De Tocqueville, in his "Democracy in America," "to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply, 'To the superiority of their women.'" This was written twenty years before the curtain rose upon the great drama of the Civil War. In the commencement and prosecution of that struggle were displayed a purpose, a devotion, and a self-sacrifice, which made it the proudest episode of human history, and made American manhood, at its close, the hope of the world. That result was largely the work of the patriotic women of America.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE AND LINCOLN'S MOTHER UNDISTINGUISHED CAUSES OF GLORIOUS RESULTS.

"The women of the United States," says De Tocqueville, "are confined within the narrow circle of domestic life, and their situation is, in some respects, one of extreme dependence; yet I have nowhere seen women occupying a loftier position." Harriet Beecher Stowe was the wife of a poor clergyman and the mother of a large family; she wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin" under the stress of the most arduous domestic duties, yet "that book," says Barrett Wendell, in his History of American Literature, "was the most potent literary force of the anti-slavery days."

"That inimitable work," said Joshua R. Giddings, in his speech of December 14, 1852, "is now carrying truth to the minds of millions, who, to this time, have been deaf to the cries

of the downtrodden. It is arousing the sensibilities of this country and of Europe. A woman with her pen has done more for the cause of freedom than any savant, statesman, or politician."

"The European public," wrote Motley, in 1853, "knows nothing of America, but everybody has read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' I am glad of it, because I believe the only way the curse is ever to be taken from the nation is by creating at home and abroad an atmosphere in which slavery cannot live."

"New England wives," said Hinton Rowan Helper, in 1857, in the preface of *The Impending Crisis*, "have written the most popular anti-slavery literature of the day." "The name," he says, "of Harriet Beecher Stowe is everywhere wreathed and immortalized on the scrolls of liberty."

The literary critic, the anti-slavery statesman, the great historian of civil and religious liberty, and the apostle of the Southern poor whites, have united in glorifying the influence of one earnest, but unpretentious, American woman.

The mother of Abraham Lincoln, too, was, in unromantic eyes, a household drudge under conditions of material poverty and hardship, which brought her to an untimely death in his tenth year. Yet none other could have kindled in Lincoln the divine spark which made him, to us, the most admirable of men. His great virtues were the most simple; he had no equipment that a wholesome, strong, Christian mother could not give. His soul *was* heroic, and did not merely become so. Nothing that we do after our tenth year is controlling in our character. When Lincoln's mother died, the man was already formed for circumstance to work upon until he should become, as he was destined to be, its master. To a curious biographer, who pressed Lincoln to indicate in his ancestry, the source of his strength, he said, not without a touch of gentle reproach, "My mother."

These two women, Harriet Beecher Stowe and the mother of Lincoln, unquestionably had more influence, as first causes, to initiate the movement to wipe out human slavery in the United States and to give that movement the character which made it irresistible, than all the men together. The generous purpose of the defence of the Union can never be misconceived where the enduring work of Mrs. Stowe is read. Nancy Hanks will never lack a monument where the beloved face of Abraham Lincoln is remembered. The Spartan mother has become immortal, the Roman matron an ideal; the hundredth anniversary

of the birth of Lincoln witnesses the world's unconscious homage to American womanhood, the apotheosis of the old-fashioned American mother.

THE HOME THE SOURCE OF NATIONAL STRENGTH.

It is to the American home that we look for the maintenance of the moral earnestness, strength of character, and true patriotism which have made the nation great. The modest abodes of the masses and the mansions of the rich have been fortresses equally unyielding in the defence of free institutions. The humblest house for human habitation, the log cabin in the wilderness, was hallowed one hundred years ago as the birth-place of Abraham Lincoln. That it is to-day enshrined in the American heart augurs well for the future of the Republic.

TO PROTECT THE HOME THE REAL OBJECT OF THE CIVIL WAR.

It was to protect the American home, however humble, that the Civil War was fought. While Webster pleaded, in his Seventh of March Speech, that the Union must, at any cost, be preserved, and the Supreme Court declared, in the Dred Scott Case, that the foundation of national life was a uniform rule of property, thousands of American women felt and knew that the nation did not really live while women of any race had their children torn from them under protection of its laws, and while no woman could instruct her children in love of country without a blush, or tell them without equivocation the meaning of the American flag or the value of their birthright.

ATTACK ON THE FAMILY STIRRED NORTHERN BLOOD.

It was not so much the figurative welding of shackles on men that caused and won the Civil War as it was the attack on the sanctity of the family that burst the bonds of self-respect and made the very idea of slavery haunting and intolerable. It was this phase of involuntary servitude which Mrs. Stowe emphasized and which fired the soul of Lincoln, when he first saw, at New Orleans, in 1831, negro women and girls put up for sale in the auction room. Turning to his companion, John

Hanks, he said: "John, if I ever get a chance to hit that institution I'll hit it hard, by the Eternal God." "Such things," said Garrison, "make me ashamed of my color." "We," said the women of the North, "have men ashamed for their sex, who will right this wrong."

THE SACRIFICES OF NORTHERN WOMEN UNSTINTED.

It should be remembered that not a Northern man was to suffer in the War, but a Northern woman was to be saddened. To most of them the mere absence of their men meant privation and poverty. To some the sorrows were crushing. Lincoln wrote to Mrs. Bixby, of Boston:

"November 1, 1864.

"DEAR MADAM:—I am shown, in the files of the War Department, a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which would attempt to beguile you from a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

"Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

DEVOTION OF NORTHERN WOMEN NOT EMOTIONAL BUT MORALLY HEROIC.

But for the moral strength of such Northern women the war must have been abandoned. Opportunities to end it, presented by the elections of 1862 and 1864, were scorned. To the unselfish devotion which assured the glorious result, an eloquent Southerner has added his tribute: "We understand," said Henry W. Grady, in his speech on The New South, "that when Lincoln signed The Emancipation Proclamation, your victory was assured, for he then committed you to the cause of human

liberty—against which the arms of men cannot prevail—while those of our statesmen, who trusted to make slavery the cornerstone of the Confederacy, doomed us to defeat, so far as they could, committing us to a cause that reason could not defend in the sight of advancing civilization.” It was the moral issue that won. “No free communities,” says De Tocqueville, “ever existed without morals, and morals,” he adds, “are the work of woman.” It was, certainly in great part, the lofty patriotism and heroic self-sacrifice of American women that saved the nation and made it all free.

LINCOLN APPRECIATED THE WOMEN’S PART IN THE WAR.

That Lincoln was conscious of the support of the women was constantly made evident. The real grandeur of his character was his moral earnestness and entire devotion to duty, but its greatest charm was his perfect chivalry. His very strength was not rudely masculine. The instinctive gentleness, the patience, the sadness, the almost superhuman endurance, in which there was sympathy, faith, and courage for all, were what men seek in the source of all comfort—a mother. When the sisters, wives, sweethearts, daughters, and mothers of soldiers in trouble came to him and said: “These are our boys,” they but spoke for him. He was as the head of one great family, and thought and felt for all. With all his strength he had the heart of a child. Who can doubt that in the crushing burdens of his hour of trial the image of his mother was often before him, and that the memory of her moral strength in trouble sustained him?

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN HOUSEHOLD THE GAUGE OF NATIONAL DESTINY.

A nation’s greatest product is its men. America has proved how largely their value is due to woman. The custodians of American homes are the guardians of the country’s future. The bringing up of the boys and girls of each generation with an appreciation of the mission of their country and the part that each must play in its cause is woman’s work. The product is magnificent, but the process is, most often, heroic. Those in positions of power who, discerning valor though unsung, contribute to lighten the toil of the plodders of the average home,

may boast that they have partaken of the inspiration of the life of Lincoln and are doing their share to preserve American institutions. To raise the standard of living and to keep down its cost is a paramount problem, ethical as well as material, which the nation shares with its workers. Since the service performed by the National, State, and Municipal governments and by quasi-public corporations acting under governmental authority, enters inexorably and in irreducible proportion into the life of the individual, the increasing of efficiency, the decreasing of charges, and the consequent extension of use, advance civilization, develop the social spirit, and, by elevating the masses of the people, react to strengthen and dignify government itself. Domestic science is the safest test of political economy. Solicitude for the well-being of all the people is the surest guarantee of the national welfare. To give a fairer chance to the average American will always be the grateful purpose of the profoundest and most patriotic statesmanship. Americans instinctively apprehend the first object for serious economic provision. Lincoln's all-comprehending sympathy, unclouded grasp of the importance of national integrity to the people and principles he loved, were a purely American product, and his acts but revealed in a very striking way all that is most noble in the American character and destiny. Never was more clearly illustrated anywhere than in his personality and work the true nobility of the common virtues, the one great lesson of our history. For forty years before the Civil War it was firmly believed by many that wealth, descent, and color absolutely determined worth. The fallacy of the color test, for either negative or positive conclusions, has been plain to all for fifty years. The discouraging doctrine that sustained greatness must be distinguished in its source and in its manifestations, Lincoln's career and the simplicity of his nature have refuted for all time. An appreciation of the struggle for existence was a powerful element of Lincoln's usefulness; he himself experienced that problem in more of its stages, from log hut to White House, than any other man of his time. Lincoln learned as a child what, sooner or later, each must learn, that the real crucible of goodness is the family and the touchstone woman. The history of nations teaches, and none more emphatically than our own, that the arch of true national greatness is family life and that woman is its keystone. While the nation builds upon the success of its toiling men and women in their common

struggle for decent living, happiness, respect, and the survival of the better self, it cannot die, but will live on, leading in the march of evolution. Until the honored position of American women is lowered, the mission of America will never be abandoned. As soon will the name of Abraham Lincoln be forgotten.

THE INSPIRATION OF LINCOLN'S LIFE UNIVERSAL.

Not only in America, but among the nations, there has been no influence more potent than the memory of Lincoln to make all feel the imperious necessity of human justice and the essential kinship of all mankind. There are some traditions, prized as national, which the whole world cherishes. It matters little, as was said, with certainly not more truth, of Washington, what immediate spot may be the birthplace of such a man as Lincoln. No people can claim, no country can appropriate him. The boon of Providence to the human race, his fame is eternity, his residence, creation.

THROUGH THE WORDS OF LINCOLN AMERICA HAS INSPIRED THE WORLD.

Not only did Lincoln, better than any other, express the feelings and aspirations of America, but through a literary quality which carried by its sheer beauty, he brought the message of his country home to the people of every land. Transparent honesty and unsophisticated manliness of character breathe through every line of his writings, and their compelling appeal no mind can fail to understand, or, comprehending, resist. In the Gettysburg Speech, and in the closing paragraph of the First Inaugural Address, he chiseled, on the background of American history, literary cameos which embodied the American spirit and formed, together, the universal epic of human liberty. Such treasures belong, not to literature, but to the common heart of man. With his example they have gone far to dedicate all men to the proposition for which the heroes of one nation died.

THE MEMORY OF LINCOLN AN AMERICAN WORLD POWER.

Our greatest orator before Lincoln apostrophized "a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her

possessions and military posts; whose morning drumbeat, following the sun, and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth daily with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England." Lincoln gave expression to a new power in the world's work. "We are not enemies," he said, "but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break the bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and every patriotic grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." The name of Lincoln will be forever associated with a power greater than all the standing armies of the world, the power you women seek to voice, stronger than the drumbeat of England, with a note more steady, more true, more unceasing, and with an echo world-wide and instantaneous, the generous heartbeat of the American people.

71.2004 084 03785





